

Assess your inclusive teaching

Instructors should assess, or self-evaluate, their inclusive teaching practices and pedagogical choices as well as solicit perspectives from students and others, such as faculty colleagues and learning and teaching center experts. Stephen Brookfield, in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, advocates for instructors regularly to examine their teaching through the lenses of self, students, and colleagues as well as through engagement with theoretical literature (refer to *Principle 8*).⁶⁴ This is particularly important for continued growth in inclusive teaching practices.

To create inclusive learning environments, critical reflection is necessary to uncover areas of strength and those in need of improvement. Loughran finds, “Reflection is effective when it leads the teacher to make meaning from the situation in ways that enhance understanding so that she or he comes to see and understand the practice setting from a variety of viewpoints.”⁶⁵ Frequent reflection is necessary because creating inclusive learning environments is an ongoing process.

The self-reflection on social identity discussed in *Principle 1* should also be directed at one’s pedagogical practices and the equity and power dynamics in the classroom. Just as we can be unaware of our unconscious biases, we may be unaware of how they influence behaviors in the classroom unless we actively reflect.⁶⁶ Using surveys; quick, formative assessments; peer observations; and other similar measures, faculty can regularly scrutinize, interrogate, and reflect on their practice so that they may improve.

Because student learning is affected by course climate, it is important to understand student perceptions and to recognize that different students may perceive climate differently from one another and from the instructor’s intended climate. Student feedback can uncover subtle behaviors and class interactions that leave students feeling unwelcome in the course or that negatively affect their learning. When practices intended to be inclusive do not affect students in a positive manner, it is crucial that instructors reflect critically and make changes.⁶⁷

Student feedback can allow students to take an active role in shaping their learning and provides the opportunity for instructors to model reflection, revision, and adaptation.⁶⁸ In this way, instructors become “co-agent[s] with the pupils in the learning process.”⁶⁹

Instructors can also solicit external feedback, reflection, and evaluation from peers or from a campus resource such as the Searle Center for Advancing Learning and

Teaching. Outside observers not only can provide observations and data on your teaching practice and methods, but also can collaborate to create solutions.⁷⁰

When evaluating one’s inclusive teaching, the processes of meaningful evaluation and reflection can be adaptive (leading to improving practice), collaborative (learning from others), and transformative (responding to social, political, ethical, and moral issues) and lead to more inclusive learning environments.⁷¹

TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. **Reflect on your own experiences as a learner and as a teacher.** Brookfield suggests keeping a teaching journal and reflecting on lessons from role models and professional development. Reflect on how your biases may affect your teaching (refer to *Principle 1*).
2. **Reflect on your inclusive teaching strategies.** What practices do you utilize to encourage active learning and create a welcoming course climate? Consider the strategies throughout this resource, noting which you use frequently, occasionally, or not at all, and which you might adapt. Apply the following questions:
 - Which of the techniques, approaches, and ideas employed in teaching were successful and which were less successful, and why? What might you do differently next time?
 - How did students with varied social identities react to and interact with the strategies and materials? Were there any discernible differences across social identity groups?
 - What lessons have been learned for subsequent courses? What did you learn about your teaching or students? Were your ideas about teaching and learning challenged in any way?
3. **Seek student feedback in a variety of forms** beyond end-of-term student evaluations. Brookfield recommends that instructors seek student feedback weekly with a short question on learning. For inclusive teaching, this question could ask about comfort participating in class discussions or projects or about which instructor actions were helpful to learning. Methods for soliciting student feedback include polling in Canvas, which can be done anonymously, and using a notecard at the end of in-person classes. Respond to the class in a general way, without directly identifying students who provided feedback, and make adjustments when necessary.

4. **Solicit feedback from peers.** Peers can observe classroom dynamics and pedagogical practices. Peers can also be asked to gather data, such as who participates and how often. Benefits of peer observers and evaluators are the potential for collaborative problem-solving and the opportunity to promote a department-wide focus on improving inclusive teaching.
5. **Solicit feedback from external partners.** Faculty at Northwestern can seek external feedback from the Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching. Depending on the course, the center can provide structured observations, surveys, focus groups, and consultations as well as a [small group analysis](#) (SGA), which is a confidential service for Northwestern faculty, postdocs, and graduate students. The SGA provides instructors with detailed and constructive midterm feedback directly from their students about the instruction and their learning in the class. This process often yields information and insights that do not emerge from end-of-term course evaluations.

EXAMPLE

An instructor has modified a course he has frequently taught by adding more time for class discussion to encourage a learning-centered approach with enhanced collaboration and course dialogue. Midway through the term, he solicits feedback from students, using an anonymous poll. He is surprised to find that some students feel excluded from discussion. He reports the findings to the class and reviews the classroom discussion guidelines that class members created on the first day. He also asks a colleague to observe class discussion. The colleague notes that the instructor tends to call on the same students and suggests waiting or asking students to write for a minute before raising hands, in order to encourage participation from more students. The instructor researches additional strategies for encouraging all students to participate; for each strategy, he notes whether he engages in that method frequently, occasionally, or not at all. The instructor also reflects on his teaching. He considers how unconscious biases might affect who he calls on and who feels empowered to participate during discussion. He incorporates new strategies for discussion the following term.